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February 21, 2006

Thomas Johnson  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
1227 O St  
California Department Of Veterans Affairs  
Sacramento, California 95814-5840

Dear Secretary Johnson:

As a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs, I requested a report from the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) on the unique situation at Fort Ord for the establishment of a veterans cemetery.

As explained in the attached report, the VA's National Veterans Cemetery Program will meet the projected burial needs of the majority of our nation's veterans. Criteria for National Cemeteries include population and distance requirements; an area must be inhabited by at least 170,000 veterans within a 70 mile radius, and be farther than 75 miles from another National Cemetery. As we both know, Fort Ord does not meet either of those requirements; only 50,000 veterans live in the tri-County area and Fort Ord is within 75 miles, as measured in a straight line, to the San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery.

However, veterans and their families still have the option of a federal government established, state operated State Veterans Cemetery. Under this federal-state partnership the federal government pays for 100% of construction costs and the state assumes annual operations and maintenance costs. As the VA reports, "the establishment of a State Veterans Cemetery is the best alternative to enhance burial service for veterans in the Fort Ord area".

At our most recent meeting in Washington, DC in November, we discussed the establishment of a State Veterans Cemetery at Fort Ord. At that time I mentioned an innovative "outside the box" proposal to end the stalemate on funding between the state and federal government. Partnering the State with a local funding stream is an option I am still pursuing. I would like to meet with you to further discuss this issue.

I look forward to working with you on this project to give our veterans a final resting place on the Central Coast.

Sincerely,  
  
SAM FARR  
Member of Congress

*I am sure, working together with the locals,  
we can make this happen. Thanks*